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DECORATION & FURNITURE

THE LIGHTING AND DECORATION OF PICTURE GALLERIES.

PICTURE hanging has become one of the decorative arts about which all persons of refinement are supposed to know something nowadays. Whether the object be a modest pen-sketch, a sparkling water-color, or a substantial work in oil, the disposition of it on the wall may help or injure it, according as it may or may not be appropriately placed. The hanging, hardly less than the framing of a picture,

ter much what tint they hang upon. Good taste alone can dictate their grouping and arrangement. But when a picture in color is to be hung, the task becomes more serious, and demands a more discriminating intelligence and a nicer judgment.

The background must be chosen with a view to enhancing the attractions of the work suspended on it, the accessories in the way of furniture, carpets and tapestry must be selected with the same intent, and the light so managed as to bring out the full value of the picture.

Indeed, it is upon the latter point that the former ones

room requires a richer general scheme of preparation. Nor is it only the quantity of light, but the direction from which the light comes, and its liability to vary, which has to be considered.

There is in this city a dealer's gallery which probably presented some of the most formidable obstacles an architect could have to contend with. It is a square room, very lofty, and lighted by a skylight. The light is rendered cold and sharp by the height from which it falls and by the external surroundings of the building. Yet by the use of old-gold plush for the walls, such a cheerful aspect has been imparted to the gallery as one



THE NEW AMERICAN ART GALLERIES. VIEW OF THE UPPER PART OF THE PRINCIPAL GALLERY.

DRAWN BY THE ARCHITECT, H. EDWARDS FICKEN.

has much to do with the establishment of its value as a decorative object.

For works in black and white, such as engravings, etchings, drawings, photographs, and so on through the various branches of monochrome, the chief end to be attained is proper lighting. Given this, it does not mat-

depend, for the arrangement of a room in which pictures are to be hung is governed chiefly by the quantity and quality of the illumination available. A deep, dark parlor, lighted by only a small window, calls for a certain lighting which shall counteract the normal weakness of the light itself. A brilliantly illumined

would scarcely have supposed to have been possible. In this case the light is fixed and equable in quality, never brilliant, and often dull. The color of the wall brightens the room when the latter condition prevails, and it is never rendered aggressive by any burst of light.

The same architect not long ago decorated an artist's

studio in which the very opposite conditions prevailed. This apartment is roomy, and flooded with light from a huge north window. A problem here was to provide against an excess of light, not to augment a deficient illumination. By coloring the walls a deep, rich olive green, and tempering the light by canoping the window with a curtain supported on spears, the desired end was attained. In each of these cases the pictures hung are given an excellent relief, there are no elements of color in the walls which conflict with the painter's work, and the prevailing tone of the apartment harmonizes the light with which it is supplied.

The use of lighter wall coloring is to be recommended only under such conditions as have been indicated. No light color should be used which is likely to conflict with the pictures. Gray is a deadly tint, because it is bound to interfere with certain qualities inseparable from the painter's productions. Japanese gold leather paper, subdued by glazes of bitumen, has been utilized with excellent effect in a large room in the Lotos Club; but this background can be used only in apartments where sunlight seldom penetrates. Sunlight inevitably brings out the latent glow of the gold, and sets it in conflict with the frames, while it renders the background too brilliant for the pictures. With an evenly distributed electric light, or by gaslight, this Japanese leather paper is very effective.

For large or bright galleries olive green and maroon will probably never find substitutes. In Germany and in Europe generally olive green is quite a favorite wall color, and it has recently been used a good deal in this country; but it lacks the warmth and rich, temperate glow of maroon. The new American Art Galleries, which, in the opinion of the best critics, are probably unequalled and certainly are unsurpassed on this continent, afford an excellent example of the proper application of the principles which should be applied to the construction and lighting of picture galleries.

These spacious rooms are panelled in oak stained to the deep color of age, the doors being heavily grained in the same. The paneling and general ornamentation are broad and simple in treatment. The walls are maroon—or, strictly speaking, two or three shades lighter than maroon: somewhat too bright in our opinion—and the cove above it a light

chocolate brown, touched with gold here and there, just enough to break the monotony, without doing violence

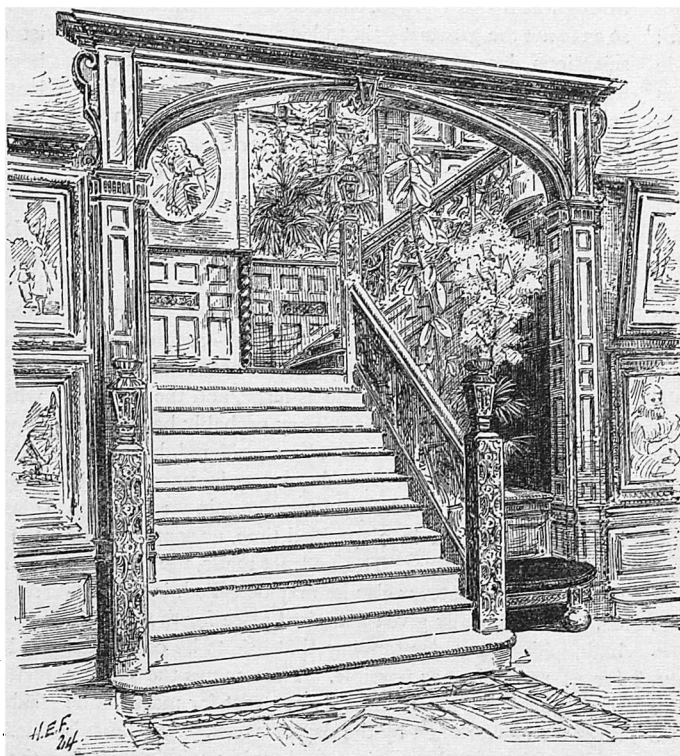
to the eye. It is enough to say that the color is harmonious and sets off to the best advantage the pictures on the walls, giving warmth without hotness, the brightest daylight being nicely held in balance by the sober richness of the general effect.

The illumination of the larger galleries is derived at night from gas side-lights, in the smaller galleries from rows of centre-lights, the fixtures being deprived of the rigid ugliness of gas-pipes generally by graceful and delicate ornamentation in wrought iron. The architect of the galleries, Mr. H. Edwards Ficken, has provided against the excessive heat, seemingly almost inseparable from brilliant lighting by gas, by an admirable system of ventilation through the skylights and at the angles of the rooms. Ventilation is a consideration generally overlooked in the construction of a picture gallery. The older galleries the world over are very defective in this respect, and when they are crowded are only saved from being absolutely untenable by their vastness and height.

The use of the electric light might overcome some of the inconveniences of defective ventilation; but the time apparently has not come yet when a satisfactory service can be depended on. The Lotos Club has it in use in its parlors; but so little dependence can be placed upon it that the gas service is also retained, and it comes in very opportunely sometimes when the electric light gently fades away, and it becomes necessary to light the gas to discover it; or when, as happened recently during a picture exhibition and "Ladies' Day" at the Lotos Club, the electric light went out altogether, and left the guests in total darkness. Yet, sooner or later,

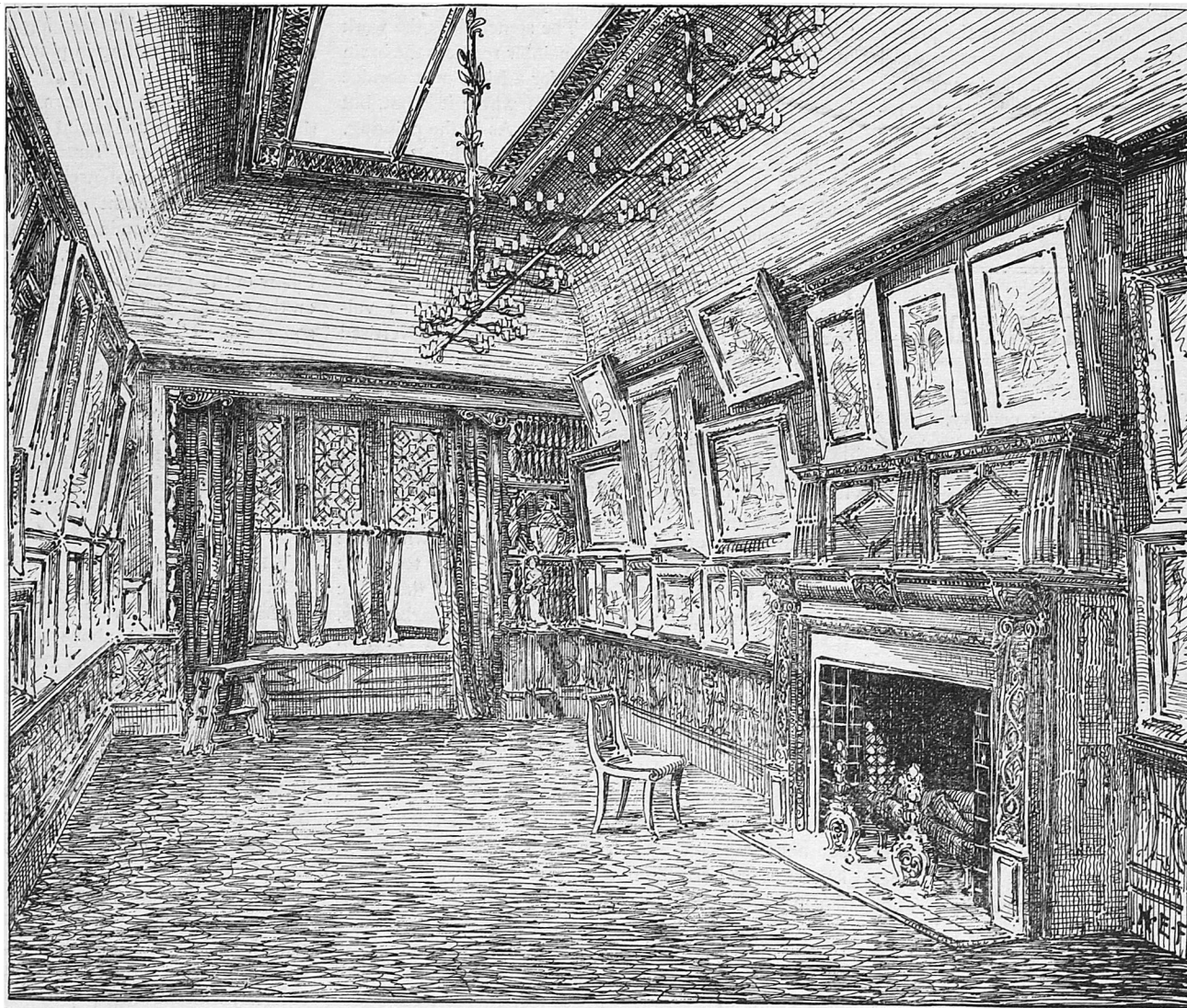
we suppose, the system will be perfected, and the new method of illumination will be adopted in art galleries. In the meanwhile gas, by the use of proper reflectors, can be made to afford satisfactory illumination without detracting from the mellowness of the effect of the painter's work, which the cold electric light certainly does.

Besides the general decoration of the picture-gallery, the accessory decoration must be taken into account, and the intelligent consideration of the details of this is absolutely essential to the production of the desired



THE NEW AMERICAN ART GALLERIES. THE STAIRCASE.

DRAWN BY THE ARCHITECT, H. EDWARDS FICKEN.



THE NEW AMERICAN ART GALLERIES. ONE OF THE SMALLER ROOMS.

DRAWN BY THE ARCHITECT, H. EDWARDS FICKEN.

unobtrusive pattern of a lighter shade. Of the other accessories, of furniture—the plainest—and of window and door-hangings, it is not necessary to speak in detail.

harmony of effect. The disposition of statuary is practically a part of the decorative portion of the work, and the breaking of the monotony of a long gallery by the

introduction of growing plants has also much to do in producing a general satisfactory result. It is always understood, however, that such objects can only be suitably used in galleries of good size. Placing them in small rooms not only occupies valuable space, but dwarfs the pictures. A marble statue in a small room will, by the contrast of its pallor, darken everything about it; and while it makes its surroundings sombre, it is made harsh itself by the reaction of the very effect it produces on them. In a spacious, well-lighted gallery, however, it receives justice, and if properly placed it does not injure anything else. Bronze and terra-cotta can be made to harmonize anywhere, and their disposition in any room is only a question of size and space. Plants have no proper place indoors save where room and light are abundant. Oriental porcelains and similar bric-a-brac can also be used in the embellishment of the picture-gallery, but no objects should be brought into contrast with paintings which offer any violent differences to them in color or tone. The pictures will establish a harmony of their own, and whatever accessories you may employ in the further decoration of the gallery must be selected with a distinct view to their fitness, and made to contribute intrinsically and through their appropriateness to the symmetry and beauty of the whole.

There is one point which should never be overlooked in the construction of a gallery—that is, the avoidance of a sky line. It is against common-sense to place pictures so that they cannot be seen. The hanging wall, therefore, should be measured only to a reasonable height. However, the hanging and the framing of pictures offer a subject for discussion by themselves, too important to be restricted by the dimensions of this article.

The simpler and scantier the furniture of a gallery is, the better. Centre seats, from which the larger works can be advantageously studied, should be placed at judicious distances from the wall. They should be constructed and upholstered in conformity with the prevailing feeling of the gallery. They are for use, not for show. Chairs should be selected with a similar view to their fitness as parts of the whole. In all stages of the construction and furnishing of a gallery, it should be borne in mind that the purpose is to provide a home for certain works of art and facilities looking to the proper appreciation of them. They are all important, and all steps taken must be with a view to displaying them at their best. A collection of good pictures will better receive justice in a bare shed properly lighted, than in the most magnificent drawing-room where a jumble of inappropriate objects and an antagonistic splendor of decoration and furnishing conflict with them, and call attention from them at every turn.

Notes on Decoration.

THERE is no greater check to the healthful growth of art knowledge and artistic taste in this country, at the present time, than in the vitiating system of contract decoration, which now controls the most important undertakings carried out here. There are many sincere, honest and talented workers, whose labors are all for the best, and who are constantly active in practically advancing their art; but their work is modest in its extent, and little known to the public. The important work—that which comes most under the public eye, and is most potential in its magnitude—is given into the control of men whose incompetency is only offset by their control of the capital, which is now necessary in the costly business decoration has grown to be in this country.

HERE is a firm which makes a business of interior decoration. Its members are business men who have invested a certain amount of capital in their enterprise, not for love of art or from a desire to advance it, but merely to earn a larger profit than they can see in other kinds of business, where the field is overcrowded. They may have some ideas on art, though, as a rule, they have none whatever. At any rate, those they have are entirely superficial. Of art education—that primal necessity to the decorator—they have none. They manage their business on a business basis, relying on a foreman to provide all the art necessary to it. This foreman is a competent man. If he were not, he could not hold his place. But he is working for wages, and for those wages he is expected to consider, first, the interests of the house—those of his art afterward. He is looked to to provide a "good job," for in contract decoration art

becomes a mere job, like that of the bricklayer or the plasterer, who prepares the house to be embellished. But he must consider that job, not from the standpoint of an artist, willing to do the very best he can within his means, but from that of an employé paid to carry work through at the very lowest cost decent work will admit of, so as to net the greatest gain to his employers. The conscientious decorator often carves very deeply into the legitimate profits of his commission, in order to do himself the greater justice, because in giving his patron the very best, he is making a reputation for himself and satisfying his artistic conscience. The contract decorator is never guilty of any such weakness. When the work is "good enough," it is done. There is no such thing as cumulative perfection to him.

SUCH a house as I take for illustration—and there are many like it that could be readily named—secures a contract for the decoration of, say a great hotel. The sum appropriated for this purpose is large, and the proprietors demand the very best. They probably have some ideas of their own which must be considered, but in the main the discretion of the decorator is unhampered. So much money is to be paid for a certain work, which is to be performed in a specified time, or sooner, if the contractor so chooses. The contract made, the foreman, art expert, or whatever else he may be called, is consulted. He is usually given a limited price for the work in bulk, with the understanding that it is to be completed for as much less as possible. Then comes the process of cheapening. He makes his contract for material, he hires men—workmen by the day or week, at workmen's wages—always with a view to keeping within his allowance. He may, perhaps, give a few of the most salient and important decorations to artists of independent standing, but he will not if he can help it, for such work is costly. The labor of decoration begins, and is advanced, not as a fine art, but as a mere mechanical performance. The minimum of thought is given to it. No study is wasted over the appropriateness, the originality, or the intrinsic merit of the general design or the details which make it up. No costlier labor is employed than can be avoided. It is a "job," in short, and a "job" it is when it is done. The stencil does the work of the hand. The hand of the painter replaces the brain and eye of the artist. A design for a frieze or a cornice is selected, not because it belongs where it is put, but because it looks well enough there. As in the painting, so in all the details of the work, superficial effect is all that is striven for. The cabinet work is carved and set up, the bargain tapestries hung, the metal work made a show of, the windows filled with glass of some sort, the floors are covered, and the whole performance turned over in the end—a mass of heartless, speculative splendor, as gorgeous and as vulgar as money and bad taste can make it—and advertised in the newspapers as an eighth wonder of the world. The greater the opportunity for splendid and consistent work, the greater the profit also, and, therefore, the more worthy the attention of the speculator. "The most show for the least money," is the trade cry before which art flies, leaving the audacious ingenuity of charlatanism to supply her place. The result is, that, while the artist finds an outlet for his art only in places to which the public has no access, and can, therefore, only teach his lessons to a limited circle, the tradesman holds the public eye, and perpetuates, with his vulgarities and barbarisms, the ignorance and bad taste which wiser and less selfish men are striving so hard to overcome.

IT is this system which plants a French château at the corner of a fashionable avenue in New York, and places a moat around it, as if it were a feudal castle; which sets up in our variable and essentially northern climate the villas of Italy and of Spain, where the sun never ceases to shine; which covers walls with broken glass and bottle bottoms, to simulate the coarse splendor in which some cheap North African monarch revels in gaudy bankruptcy; which gives us hotels that might be barracks, and private houses in which we cannot live without experiencing the sensation of the poor little rich man's daughter, who recently asked, after a week's probation in the depressing splendors of the Gothic dining-room, "Mamma, must we always eat in church?"

WHILE in Washington recently I visited the White House to see the new decorations by Louis C. Tiffany. The work is a great disappointment. Trifling and small in its general scheme, and utterly unrepresentative of the

traditions of the place, it shows a total absence of serious thought or feeling. This, in one of our most conspicuous national buildings, is much to be deplored, for such work must inevitably have bad influence with the indiscriminating public, who will be inclined to accept it, from its very prominence, as all that is to be desired. An artist of Mr. Tiffany's ability one might reasonably have hoped would have gladly availed himself of the excellent opportunity afforded to leave at the National Capital a leading example of what is good, and desirable in the decoration of so important a place as the residence of the head of the Republic.

IN the entrance hall, the old ground-glass screen dividing it into a public and private hall has been replaced by stained glass—presumably Mr. Tiffany's—large and coarse in color and design, of a nondescript character. Surely, such a simple problem might have been worked out with something in perforated woodwork, covered with silk, which would have had dignity and character, especially at night. As it is, with gaslight on either side, the effect of the glass is lost, and only the coarseness of the design is shown by the leading. By day the glass only shows from the side generally shut off from the visiting public, and the dead side, facing the main entrance, has the same coarse feeling as at night on both sides.

IN the East Room the woodwork of white and gold is left untouched, Mr. Tiffany decorating the ceiling and side-walls. The room retains also its old crystal chandeliers, mirrors and other fixtures, which now give it the character of a charming old French marquise arrayed in a modern fancy dress. The ceiling is an imitation of Moorish mosaic inlay, in which silver predominates, and jangles the room out of tone. In general character it is similar to Mr. Tiffany's work in the hall of the Union League Club here, but the detail is lost in the perspective of the room, and what was intended to be large, effective massings of fine work in spots becomes mere blurred disks of tarnished silver. A gray paper covers the walls, its design being, I hope, an unintentional imitation of tufted texture, but it is unmistakably so in its effect, gold dots seeming to represent gilt-headed nails holding the tufting in place. It looks cheap.

THE Blue Room has been re-decorated without the slightest regard to the quaint old white marble-columned mantelpiece, old gilt-framed mirror and candelabra. The walls are in an intensely vivid blue, slightly green in tone, with opalescent glass plaques in semi-Moorish design for backgrounds to the side-lights, the leading showing in its natural color, and, I suppose, intended to follow out the scheme of the silver appliqué ornaments on the ceiling. These are laid on a ground set off in squares like oil-cloth, alternating in light green and a steely blue, a stencil of the American shield being carried out over all in endless repetition. Imagine the effect of all this with the mellow, time-worn gilt on the mantel candelabra and mirror! And still further, imagine the effect of light sickly green opaque glass tiles set round the fire-place opening, in Mr. Tiffany's favorite manner, in the old white marble mantel!

WHAT is known as the Red Room is really refreshing in its quiet and harmonious coloring below the line of the frieze, for here Mr. Tiffany has seemed to have done himself justice; but above that point his imagination again runs riot. The walls are in a low-toned terra-cotta, with a dado of dark red, which takes up the general color of the new mahogany mantelpiece. The weakness of the decoration on the ceiling and frieze is disheartening, and one turns for relief from the border of Stars and Stripes, in its trivial and undignified use, to the quiet color below, without stopping to analyze the ceiling in a semi-Moorish treatment again.

IN the State dining-room there is such a frank admission of even attempt to do anything, that criticism is disarmed. The walls are of light buff, the woodwork is a shade darker, and the frieze, with a motive of stars, is out of all key with the old gilt mirrors, cornices and white marble mantels at the ends of the rooms. One leaves the building with a feeling of thorough disappointment that such a glorious opportunity has been so wasted. Can Mr. Tiffany really be personally responsible for this dismal failure, or did he leave the work to some callow subordinate?

ARCHITECT.